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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 000318

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/FO, AF/W, AND AF/RSA

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [AU](#) [MR](#)

SUBJECT: AU SUMMIT -- AF ACTING A/S CARTER MEETS WITH
MAURITANIANS

Classified By: AMBASSADOR DONALD YAMAMOTO, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: AF Acting Assistant Secretary Phillip Carter met with Mauritania's National Assembly President Messaoud Ould Boulkheir on February 1 on the margins of the AU Summit in Addis Ababa. Boulkheir thanked the USG for its unwavering support of the legitimately elected government of President Abdallahi and requested our assistance in persuading the rest of the international community, and France in particular, to continue pressuring the Mauritanian junta to leave power. End Summary.

¶2. (C) The strategy of the National Front for the Defense of Democracy (FNDD) is to ensure the junta fails, Boulkheir told Carter. President Abdallahi, who is seeking a way out of the political crisis, made an important concession when he announced recently that he would support holding new presidential elections -- on condition that the junta did not participate in them. Boulkheir placed the onus on the military to comply, but he acknowledged that the junta has shown no inclination to relinquish power. He praised the USG for its rejection of the coup. "It's what keeps us going. The struggle continues," he said. The election of President Obama had helped keep Mauritanian hopes alive, he added.

¶3. (C) AU and international pressure appears to be having some effect. Boulkheir said coup leader General Aziz has lost the support of Ahmed Ould Daddah, head of the Rally of Democratic Forces party, and he is talking less in public about his candidacy for president. "We should find ways to increase the problems for him," Carter suggested. Boulkheir was also grateful to the AU for speaking out against coups, and noted that the AU's recent communique reaffirming its opposition to the Mauritanian coup seems to have quieted the junta's unilateral call for June elections. Of concern, however, is Senegal's lobbying of other West African states to support the junta. Senegal has also extradited a Mauritanian military officer who had been openly critical of the junta.

¶4. (C) Carter asked if Abdallahi's supporters were lobbying other West African states and noted that Ghana's Vice President was supportive of the Abdallahi camp. Carter added that he had advocated for a restoration of constitutional order in Mauritania and Guinea at each of his meetings on the margins of the AU Summit. Carter and Boulkheir agreed that while there was a worrying anti-democratic trend in Africa, states such as Nigeria had taken strong positions against military coups.

¶5. (C) Carter inquired whether Arab League states continued to be supportive of Abdallahi. Boulkheir replied that he was

disappointed with the Arab League, particularly after it invited coup leader General Aziz to its meeting in Doha. "We don't want to see that happen again," he said. Libyan President Qadhafi had taken a more favorable stance in support of the legitimate government.

¶6. (C) The EU presents the major obstacle, Boulkheir asserted. The French government, as a "privileged partner" of Mauritania, is split on how to respond to the Mauritania crisis, with the French presidency generally taking a harder line than the MFA on the issue of sanctions. Boulkheir appealed to the USG to intervene with President Sarkozy and the GOF.

¶7. (C) If the junta holds elections in June as it has announced, the elections will not be legitimate and the junta's credibility will be further called into question, Carter said. He asked Boulkheir about his contacts with the military. Boulkheir said he had met General Aziz three times since the August 2008 coup. During their most recent meeting ahead of the junta-organized national days of consultation, Boulkheir said he told General Aziz that the FNDD would not participate and he denounced the arrest of President Abdallahi's prime minister.

¶8. (C) Boulkheir appealed for U.S. assistance in lobbying the international community. He said the junta has used the state coffers to build up its support, including paying 14 lawmakers to travel to Addis to lobby on the margins of the AU Summit. "We would welcome help in the name of democracy," Boulkheir said, noting that he and two fellow lawmakers had

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"difficulties" reaching Addis. (Note: Those lawmakers and the Mauritanian ambassador that President Abdallahi had sent to Addis attended the February 1 meeting with Carter. End note.) Carter replied that USG resources were tight given domestic economic challenges, but the USG would see what can be done to help. He told Boulkheir that the United States would work to influence others.

¶9. (C) Regarding concrete measures that could be taken against the junta, Carter told Boulkheir that the USG would continue to urge the AU to impose sanctions should the junta not restore constitutional order. These sanctions would send a message to other would-be coup plotters, Carter said.

¶10. (C) The Mauritanian delegation provided examples of worsening conditions in their country, including civil servants being systematically replaced by cronies of the junta, and pro-Abdallahi officials being arrested on trumped up charges and incarcerated like common criminals. (Note: The Department and Embassy Nouakchott will want to coordinate the USG's response to these allegations. End note.)

¶11. (U) Acting A/S Carter approved this message.
YAMAMOTO